

Careers England Policy Commentary 26

This is the twenty-sixth in an occasional series of briefing notes on key policy documents related to the future of career guidance services in England. The note has been prepared for Careers England by Professor Tony Watts.¹

Recent Developments on the Roles of Employers and of Careers Professionals: a Pivotal Phase in Determining Future Careers Provision for Young People

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1. Late February and early March 2014 have seen the publication of five important statements and papers related to current policy debates on career support for young people in schools:

- Statements by Lord Nash (Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Schools) on the Government's intentions with regard to the forthcoming revised Statutory Guidance for Schools.²
- A speech by Nick Clegg (Deputy Prime Minister) in which he commented on careers guidance in schools.³
- A progress report issued by the National Careers Council.⁴
- A Briefing Note issued by the Careers Sector Stakeholders Alliance.⁵
- The third report of the independent Skills Taskforce set up as part of the Labour Party's Policy Review and chaired by Professor Chris Husbands.⁶

2. All five documents are potentially significant in relation to the critical core issue of whether – alongside the Government's widely-welcomed concern to involve employers more actively in careers activities for school students – the Government will also recognise the important complementary role of careers professionals and of professionally managed careers education programmes in schools. Some of the documents cover other relevant matters too: where this is the case, these will be briefly mentioned. The main focus of this Policy Commentary, however, is on this core issue.

¹ Helpful comments from Paul Chubb and Dr Tristram Hooley on an earlier draft of this Policy Commentary are gratefully acknowledged. The author is however solely responsible for the views expressed.

² House of Lords, 25 February 2014.

³ Deputy Prime Minister's Speech on *Opportunities for Young People*, 27 February 2014.

⁴ National Careers Council (2014). *Progress Report 'Six Months On: Culture Change in Careers Provision'*.

⁵ Careers Sector Stakeholders Alliance (2014). *The Roles of Employers and Career Professionals in Providing Career Support to Young People in Schools and Colleges*. CSSA Briefing Note 13.

⁶ Skills Taskforce (2014). *Qualifications Matter: Improving the Curriculum and Assessment for All*. London: Labour Party.

3. **Context.** The context to this issue has been outlined in the two preceding Policy Commentaries.⁷ The key points, based on a careful analysis of all relevant Government documents and Ministerial statements, are:

- The Government's Inspiration Vision Statement (September 2013) and subsequent Ministerial statements have focused exclusively on the contributions of employers and people in jobs, and have made no reference at all to the role of careers professionals – either careers advisers or careers education co-ordinators – in supporting such activities and integrating them into a coherent developmental careers programme. Implicitly, careers professionals and careers education programmes have been written out of the policy script.
- Michael Gove (Secretary of State for Education) stated explicitly to the House of Commons Education Select Committee (18 December 2013) that he did not believe that there was any need for 'a cadre of careers advisers'.

Michael Gove has now confirmed his position in a statement made in a speech on 3 March 2014⁸:

'For young people reflecting on which career path to follow no information is as valuable, no inspiration so powerful as the testimony of those at the front line of business. That is why the new careers guidance produced by my colleague Matt Hancock is all about cutting out the middle man and getting inspirational speakers in front of students to spark their ambitions. Students can't aspire to lives they've never known. So we need business people to visit schools, engage and inspire.'

It is clear that career professionals are the 'middle men' who are being 'cut out'.

4. It is important to note that this represents a total *volte-face* in Government policy relating to the role of careers professionals in schools.⁹ Previously, before Matthew Hancock replaced John Hayes as the responsible Minister, the policy had been to achieve a 'renaissance of the careers profession', implementing in full the recommendations of the Careers Profession Task Force, which were concerned significantly with the profession's role in schools.¹⁰ Now it seems clear that this policy has been totally abandoned.

5. This is highly relevant to the Government's plan to issue revised Statutory Guidance for schools, promised as part of the Government Action Plan¹¹ published in

⁷ Watts, A.G. (2013). *Government Vision Statement and Other Recent Developments*. Careers England Policy Commentary 24. Also Watts, A.G. (2013). *Responses by the Secretary of State for Education to the Education Select Committee*. Careers England Policy Commentary 25.

⁸ Speech on vocational education at the McLaren Technology Centre, Woking, Surrey, 3 March 2014.

⁹ Watts, A.G. (2013). *Government Vision Statement and Other Recent Developments*, para.13. Careers England Policy Commentary 24.

¹⁰ Careers Profession Task Force (2010). *Towards a Strong Careers Profession*.

¹¹ Department for Education and Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (2013). *Careers Guidance Action Plan: Government Response to Recommendations from Ofsted's Thematic Review and National Careers Council's Report*.

September 2013 alongside the Ofsted Thematic Review. The revised Guidance was intended to be issued before Christmas, but has been persistently deferred. The delays have meant that the new Statutory Guidance has not been available to inform crucial decisions being made within schools about their budgets for the next school financial year. This repeats the pattern set with the original Statutory Guidance in 2012, when similar delays meant that it was not published until 26 March in that year, with similar negative consequences.¹²

6. **House of Lords statements.** Lord Nash's statements on 25 February 2014 are significant, because they refer directly to the plans for the revised Statutory Guidance. He stated:

‘In response to Ofsted’s report, we are strengthening statutory guidance, particularly with respect to contact with the workplace, and in improving information on apprenticeships and vocational options. We are developing the role of the National Careers Service. Ofsted is ensuring that careers guidance and pupil destinations will be given greater priority in inspections.’

He continued:

‘... the revised guidance will make it clear that schools should have a strategy for the advice and guidance they provide to young people. The strategy should be embedded within a clear framework linked to outcomes for pupils rather than an ad hoc set of activities. It should reflect the school’s ethos and meet the needs of all pupils. We will share case studies so that schools can learn from the very best practice. The revised guidance will also set out clearly what schools can do to ensure that pupils have information about all the types of education and training they can pursue, and hear directly from different types of providers, including further education and sixth-form colleges, and employers delivering apprenticeships.’

7. However, when asked specifically by Baroness Hughes of Stretford (Labour) whether the Government would ‘now act to eradicate the postcode lottery in careers guidance and insist... on independent, face-to-face advice for all young people’, Lord Nash replied:

‘...the answer to her question is a firm no... the assumption that a face-to-face interview with a careers adviser is the gold standard is a very outmoded model. As noble Lords will see when we publish our guidance, I hope shortly, we have a very strong emphasis on employer engagement, which we believe is the secret to good careers advice.’

Noteworthy here are the false polarity established between employer engagement and careers adviser interviews, as though they are mutually exclusive (which they patently are

¹² Watts, A.G. (2012). *Statutory Guidance for Schools on Securing Access to Careers Guidance*, para.5. Careers England Policy Commentary 16.

not), and the use of the term ‘outmoded model’ as a rhetorical device to marginalise the latter.

8. **Deputy Prime Minister speech.** The speech on 27 February 2014 by Nick Clegg on *Opportunities for Young People* contained a number of announcements, including:

- A new UCAS-style one-stop online shop on training, apprenticeships, courses and other work-based programmes, to be maintained by Local Authorities (the relevance of the UCAS model here, and how the proposal relates to the existing National Apprenticeship Service and UCAS Progress resource, are unclear).
- Help to be provided at Jobcentre Plus for 16/17-year-olds, to be piloted (this had been trailed in the Chancellor of the Exchequer’s Autumn Statement¹³).
- New forms of provision for 18-21-year-olds, including mandatory English and mathematics provision for those lacking Level 2 qualifications in these subjects, and work experience for those who have been on Job Seekers Allowance for six months, both to be piloted.

In addition, Nick Clegg included an extended section on careers guidance in schools, which was widely mentioned in the extensive news coverage of the speech. For someone so senior in the Government to pay such attention to careers guidance is unusual, and potentially has significantly raised its current policy profile.

9. In his section on careers guidance, Nick Clegg started by indicating the deficiencies of current provision:

‘...too many young people aren’t getting what they need. In a recent survey, Ofsted found only one in five schools were giving all their students detailed careers support. And, for a lot of the young people I meet, careers guidance currently feels like a tick box exercise squeezed into lunchtime break with a busy teacher, who no doubt already has a lot on their plate.’

Hence the forthcoming revised Statutory Guidance:

‘So, we are issuing new guidance for schools, in the next few weeks, that will set out just what good careers advice should look like. And not take-it-or-leave-it guidance. To make sure it’s being followed, Ofsted will be looking more closely at the quality of careers advice and support available when they inspect schools.’

He added:

‘We hope this guidance will give every student guaranteed access to the best-quality careers advice available, whether that is face-to-face, online or via the phone.’

¹³ HM Treasury (2013). *Autumn Statement 2013*, p.53. £10 million was promised for a support service at present available only to those aged 18 and over.

10. From this preamble, one might have anticipated that it would be followed by a strong affirmation of the role of professionally trained careers advisers. The remainder of the section, however, was concerned exclusively with provision by employers and people at work:

‘... one of the most important changes we’re introducing is that schools will have a new responsibility to develop close links with employers, across their local area. This is so more young people can get the chance to meet successful business people, spend time working in their organisations and access valuable support like coaching or mentoring from people in the careers they want to do.’

Nick Clegg continued:

‘If you want to become a lawyer, a chef, a plumber, accountant or IT engineer, what’s better than sitting down and talking to someone who actually does that job, or even visiting the place where they work to see what it’s like?... So, if you’re fed up with the careers advice you’re getting now, you’ll be able to look forward to speaking to career experts, meeting people who know about the jobs you want to do and getting valuable experience in the workplace.’

So ‘careers experts’ are here defined as people at work, not careers professionals, suggesting that the earlier reference to ‘face-to-face careers advice’ (see para.9 above) might have been defined in that sense too.

11. Nick Clegg also indicated the possibility of further steps in future:

‘We’re giving schools the flexibility to decide how best they can meet the standard of support Ofsted is looking for and we will see how this works over the next few months. But, if it still feels like young people aren’t getting the support they need, there are some specific things that I would like us to do in the next Parliament. This includes encouraging a representative for local employers to sit on every school governing body and that also every school collects and publishes more detailed, up-to-date information about their pupils’ destinations post-16. This is to ensure more schools can be judged not only on their students’ exam results, but also on what they do after they leave.’

It is unclear how the proposals on destination data would go beyond the current provision.¹⁴ Again, however, there is no reference to careers professionals or careers education programmes.

12. In short, it seems that Nick Clegg has fallen in line with the position adopted by other Government Ministers, in marginalising careers professionals and careers education programmes by failing to mention them. This is particularly disappointing in the light of the important role played by his Liberal Democrat colleagues in securing attention to the

¹⁴ See: <http://www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/youngpeople/participation/a00208218/key-stage-4-and-key-stage-5-destination-measures>

provision of face-to-face careers guidance, and the quality assurance and professional competence of those who provide it. Their pressure on these issues led to the Practical Guide belatedly issued by the Department for Education in July 2012 to supplement the original Statutory Guidance.¹⁵ The Education Select Committee subsequently recommended that the Statutory Guidance be strengthened and combined with the Practical Guide into a single document. The current revision of the Statutory Guidance is, indirectly¹⁶, a response to this recommendation. It seems that Nick Clegg decided to ignore, or was not briefed about, the position previously adopted by his Liberal Democrat colleagues in this respect.

13. Intriguingly, there was a further reference to something that sounded like careers guidance in the later section of Nick Clegg's speech on the help to be provided at Jobcentre Plus for 16/17-year-olds (see para.8 above):

'This, for the first time, will give 16 and 17 year olds access to personalised jobs advice and support through Jobcentre Plus. You'll, finally, have someone there you can talk to about your options and who can give you information about different schemes like Apprenticeships and Traineeships and help you apply for jobs or training places.'

So the need to talk to someone who can cover the full range of opportunities is recognised in relation to Jobcentre Plus, but not in relation to schools (in this respect, the use of the word 'finally' in this passage is particularly ironic).¹⁷

14. **National Careers Council report.** The new report issued by the National Careers Council (NCC) relates to progress in implementing the recommendations of its report issued in June 2013.¹⁸ For each recommendation and related 'practical steps', brief statements are provided on relevant progress, with a 'traffic light' rating on the perceived level of progress.

¹⁵ Department for Education (2012). *Securing Independent Careers Guidance: a Practical Guide for Schools*. For an analysis of this document, and of the Liberal Democrat pressure which led to its publication, see Watts, A.G. (2012). *Practical Guide for Schools on Securing Independent Careers Guidance*. Careers England Policy Commentary 17.

¹⁶ The line of influence has been blurred. In the Government's original detailed response to the Select Committee report, the recommendations regarding the Statutory Guidance and Practical Guide were among a number that were deferred until the publication of the Ofsted Thematic Review. See Watts, A.G. (2013). *Government Response to Education Select Committee Report*, para.8. Careers England Policy Commentary 20. But when the decision to revise the Statutory Guidance was announced in the Government Action Plan issued alongside the Ofsted review, no explicit reference was made to the Select Committee report, or to the Practical Guide, or to the further recommendations made by the Select Committee for the revised Guidance. See Watts, A.G. (2013). *Ofsted Thematic Review and Government Action Plan*, paras.3-6. Careers England Policy Commentary 23.

¹⁷ It is also worth noting that the former Careers/Connexions Service offered this kind of advice and guidance, as well as a vacancy handling and placement service, to 16-18-year-olds.

¹⁸ National Careers Council (2013). *An Aspirational Nation: Creating a Culture Change in Careers Provision*. For a detailed analysis, see Hooley, T. (2013). Careers England Policy Commentary 21.

15. The original NCC report included a section on ‘The role of career development professionals’. Two of the ‘practical steps’ in relation to this recommendation are particularly relevant to the theme of this Policy Commentary. The first is that:

‘The National Careers Service should work more closely with the Career Development Institute (CDI) to provide and enhance a freely available on-line directory of professionally qualified career development experts which schools, colleges and universities can rely on when buying in services.’

On this step, the traffic-signal rating is green:

‘BIS and the SFA National Careers Service team are working with the CDI to agree next steps. There is a register of career development professionals (L6 qualified) maintained by the CDI (originally sponsored by BIS). Accredited Matrix providers are also listed on the Matrix website, sponsored by BIS.’

The second is that:

‘A quality assurance framework that includes organisational standards (Matrix), service standards (quality-assured against the “Quality in Careers Standard”) and business performance and people standards (Investors in People) should be promoted by the National Careers Service to lever high-quality careers provision.’

On this step, the traffic-signal rating is orange:

‘The National Careers Service operates to a high quality assurance framework based on Matrix, Ofsted inspection and contractual performance management requirements. DfE guidance to schools will set out quality expectations for their careers activities in the coming months.’

(The reference to ‘coming months’ here is somewhat troubling, in relation to the delays outlined in para.5 above, though contrasting with Lord Nash’s reference to ‘shortly’ in para.7 above.)

16. In addition, however, one of the main recommendations in the original NCC report was that:

‘A culture change is needed in careers provision for young people and adults in order to address the mismatches of skills shortages and high unemployment.’

This was accepted by the Government, which indeed invoked the concept of ‘culture change’ in its Vision Statement. But in its formal response to this particular recommendation, it was clear that it was using this concept to focus exclusively on the contributions of employers:

‘The Government plans to support the recommended culture change by promoting stronger links between employers and pupils, young people and adults who need inspiring, into thinking about their careers and the options available to them. This will not be a top down scheme but a change of approach building on the good practice that already happens in many of the best schools and colleges.’¹⁹

There was no reference here to the role of careers professionals or to quality assurance.

17. The Government’s interpretation of the ‘culture change’ concept is clearly, in this respect, very different from what the NCC appeared to have in mind. But the NCC concept was described in its report in vague and broad terms, with no clear criteria for measuring whether the desired change had taken place, so permitting it to be interpreted by the Government in whatever way it wished. And at no point has the Council subsequently challenged or even questioned the Government’s interpretation. In a short article published in October 2013²⁰, the NCC Chair (Deirdre Hughes) explicitly welcomed the Minister’s call in his Vision Statement for ‘a culture change in careers guidance’ and stated that she regarded the Government’s Careers Action Plan as ‘a major step forward in the right direction’. Now, in an Open Letter published alongside the progress report, she states that only two matters concern the Council: the need for an employer-led advisory board for the National Careers Service, and the need for the National Careers Service to offer more support to schools ‘in this period of transition’²¹.

18. It is unclear whether the NCC has not noticed the change in Government policy, or agrees with it, or is unwilling to challenge it.

19. **The CSSA Briefing Note.** Meanwhile, the Careers Sector Stakeholders Alliance (comprising more than twenty organisations) has produced a Briefing Note which clearly outlines the complementary roles of employers and careers professionals in providing career support to young people in schools and colleges. It notes that employers and people at work have a great deal to offer, but that there are also some constraints on their contributions:

- This is not core business for them. They have organisations/businesses to run and jobs to do. The extent of the time they can devote to supporting students’ career development is likely to be limited, and heavily dependent on their goodwill and enlightened self-interest.
- Their knowledge of the world is rich, but is confined predominantly to their own area of work and industry sector, and thus has an inherent partiality.

¹⁹ Department for Education and Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (2013). *Careers Guidance Action Plan: Government Response to Recommendations from Ofsted’s Thematic Review and National Careers Council’s Report*, p.10.

²⁰ *Careers Matters*, Issue 1.2, October 2013, p.6.

²¹ On the latter, the progress report states the future NCS delivery arrangements are ‘yet to be fully clarified’. It is however clear from the NCS tender document that the arrangements will be confined to brokerage with employers: no mention is made by the NCC of this restriction.

- Employers have limited knowledge of the complex educational choices facing young people which form a large part of their need for career support.
- Employers are unlikely to have in-depth conversations with individual students about the students' own strengths and interests.

It then outlines the distinctive and complementary roles of careers professionals:

- Providing *brokerage* to ensure that the contributions of employers and people at work are linked effectively to the needs of schools and young people, so saving time and adding quality on both sides.
- Managing *careers education and guidance programmes* within schools which incorporate and support the contributions of employers and people at work, so enhancing their value and ensuring their effectiveness.
- Providing *professional career guidance* which is impartial, addresses young people's distinctive interests, abilities, values and aspirations, and covers all areas of the labour market, as well as the career implications of subject and course choices.

It concludes:

‘Employers (and people at work) and career professionals both have distinctive and complementary contributions to make to the career development and career planning of young people. Working together, within a planned programme of careers education and guidance, they can provide far more effective help to young people than either could do on their own.’

20. The CSSA is sending this Briefing Note to the NCC and to a wide range of employer organisations, seeking their endorsement.

21. **Labour Party Skills Taskforce report.** Finally, the third report of the Labour Party's Skills Taskforce includes an important section on ‘helping young people make the right choices and ensuring they progress’. It notes the high consensus about the importance of this issue:

‘In our work we have been struck by the massive unanimity around the importance of Information, Advice and Guidance. The consensus is overwhelming: good, effective, independent advice and guidance is essential. OECD reaches the same view, and goes further. Their argument is that given the massive complexity of the contemporary labour market, no upper secondary system can be truly effective without an independent advice and guidance function, staffed by appropriately trained professionals’ (p.8).

The emphasis on the importance of careers professionals is explicitly recognised as being complementary to the roles of employers and technology:

‘There is good evidence that employers can play a strong role in careers advice... and there is every reason to suppose that technology can supplement good careers advice. However, none of this should detract from the core issue: that high quality, independent careers advice by appropriately trained professionals is critical in helping young people, and particularly those at risk, in negotiating the transition from education to work’ (p.8).

The Taskforce sees both the National Careers Service and Local Enterprise Partnerships as having important roles in this respect, supported by funding withheld from schools who fail to secure a next step in education and training for their pupils. These proposals merit closer inspection. For the present, however, the core arguments are particularly relevant to the theme of this Policy Commentary.

22. **Conclusion.** This is a pivotal phase in the debate about the future of the careers profession and of careers education programmes in schools. The terms of the debate are now clearly drawn. On one side, Ministers seem to be arguing that adequate career support can be provided exclusively by employers and people at work. On the other side, the CSSA is affirming the complementary roles of careers professionals and employers; this is also closely in line with the position adopted by the cross-party Education Select Committee²² and by the Labour Party Taskforce. Where other key stakeholders – including the Liberal Democrats, the NCC and employer organisations – line up in this debate is likely to determine the future of careers work in schools.

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²² House of Commons Education Committee (2013). *Careers Guidance for Young People: the Impact of the New Duty on Schools*. HC 632-1. London: Stationery Office. For an analysis, see Watts, A.G. (2013). *Education Select Committee Report on Careers Guidance for Young People*. Careers England Policy Commentary 18.